

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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HINCHEY SUPPORTS REPEAL OF BAN ON STUDENT AID

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today spoke at a press conference to announce the expansion of the coalition to repeal a provision of the 1998 Higher Education Act that denies federal financial aid to students convicted of drug-related offenses under state or federal law. The press conference was held by the Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform.

"We need to repeal this discriminatory provision at once," said Hinchey. "It singles out students for excessive and inappropriate punishment. It also clearly discriminates against students who aren't wealthy. We should be encouraging those who have had drug problems to pursue educational opportunities, not indefinitely denying them the chance to improve their lives."

The provision in question concerns the eligibility of students convicted of any drug offense for Pell grants and other forms of financial aid. Students with a single drug conviction are denied eligibility for one year. Two convictions draw a two-year ban and three convictions result in permanent ineligibility.

"No other group -not even convicted murderers- has been excluded in this way from financial aid eligibility," Hinchey added. "The government does not even require applicants for most other types of grants to make a disclosure of past drug offenses. Why should students be targeted?"

Hinchey is a cosponsor of H.R. 786, which would restore student loan eligibility to those with prior non-violent drug offenses. H.R. 786 has garnered the support of more than 70 university student government associations and national educational, student, drug reform and civil rights groups.